



**Department of
Education**
Carmen Fariña, Chancellor

**Office of School Quality
Division of Teaching and Learning**

Quality Review Report

2014-2015

Brooklyn Environmental Exploration

Middle School K664

**251 MacDougal Street
Brooklyn
NY 11233**

Principal: Craig Garber

**Date of review: November 10, 2014
Lead Reviewer: Mauricière de Govia**

The School Context

The Brooklyn Environmental Exploration School (BEES) is a middle school with 86 students from grade 6 through grade 7. The school population comprises 81% Black, 16% Hispanic, 1% White, and 0% Asian students. The student body includes 3% English language learners and 2% special education students. Boys account for 52% of the students enrolled and girls account for 48%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2013-2014 was 92%.

School Quality Criteria

Instructional Core		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
1.1 Ensure engaging, rigorous, and coherent curricula in all subjects, accessible for a variety of learners and aligned to Common Core Learning Standards and/or content standards	Additional Findings	Proficient
1.2 Develop teacher pedagogy from a coherent set of beliefs about how students learn best that is informed by the instructional shifts and Danielson Framework for Teaching, aligned to the curricula, engaging, and meets the needs of all learners so that all students produce meaningful work products	Focus	Proficient
2.2 Align assessments to curricula, use on-going assessment and grading practices, and analyze information on student learning outcomes to adjust instructional decisions at the team and classroom levels	Additional Findings	Proficient
School Culture		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
3.4 Establish a culture for learning that communicates high expectations to staff, students, and families, and provide supports to achieve those expectations	Additional Findings	Proficient
Systems for Improvement		
<i>To what extent does the school...</i>	Area of:	Rating:
4.2 Engage in structured professional collaborations on teams using an inquiry approach that promotes shared leadership and focuses on improved student learning	Celebration	Proficient

Area of Celebration

Quality Indicator:	4.2 Teacher teams and leadership development	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Teachers are engaged in professional collaborations to develop curriculum, analyze student work and plan instruction, resulting in the integration of Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) and strengthening of the instructional capacity of teachers.

Impact

Professional collaborations among teachers result in authentically crafted curricula that are aligned to the needs of all learners, including their academic and social-emotional needs.

Supporting Evidence

- During the observation of one teacher team, teachers discussed, re-worked, and “questioned” the English language Arts curriculum map they were revising in conjunction with network support. They discussed and reviewed the units of study, configuration of groups for discussion, which read alouds were appropriate, the type of reading to support the unit - partner, club, or independent reading - and the type of assessments that should support the units of study - conferences, notebooks, and/or reading logs.
- The teacher team was observed debating when to launch aspects of the English Language Arts curriculum, given student performance trends which showed that students needed greater practice with tasks that incorporate the instructional shifts and demands of the Common Core Standards. They discussed questions such as “Do you think modeling close reading would work here?” and “When should we launch the new 8th grade curriculum...should we wait or start sooner?”, Multiple drafts of the map demonstrated that teachers use their meeting time to impact the curriculum which they treat as a “living document” that is revised as the needs of the students evolve.
- “Kid Talk” is a BEES’ designed protocol that positions teachers to discuss the needs of students to enhance their social-emotional wellness. BEES’ teachers are trained via professional learning to maximize their discussions for strategies and solutions to assist children who need assistance with social-emotional development. Before engaging in “Kid Talk” BEES’ teachers prepare the *BEES Kid Talk Preparation Sheet*. This worksheet asks the teachers to consider the needs of the students such as “(has) difficulty reflecting on multiple thoughts or ideas simultaneously” or “(has) difficulty starting conversations, entering groups, connecting with people, lacks other basic social skills.” Teachers were observed using their preparation sheets to strategize solutions for a student who excelled academically but was struggling socially. During the discussion, the teachers asked questions of each other, such as “What do we want him to get better at doing? ... Does he have friends in the class? ... “How can his parents help?”
- BEES’ teachers employ a data inquiry process for looking at students’ work on teams where each member reads and evaluates a piece of student work, using a rubric and an instructional focus. The results from this protocol positively impact curriculum and teacher practice, as evidenced in the English Language Arts curriculum that is heavily guided by standards-based assessments, student work products, and areas of need such as writing arguments with clear claims.

Area of Focus

Quality Indicator:

1.2 Pedagogy

Rating:

Proficient

Findings

Across classrooms, teaching practices reflect an articulated set of beliefs about how students learn best and incorporate teaching strategies that support students in developing work products and engaging in discussions at even levels across classrooms.

Impact

Some lessons are designed to facilitate student ownership, with opportunities for all learners, including English Language Learners and students with disabilities, to produce student work products and discussions that reflect high levels of student participation.

Supporting Evidence

- BEES have three instructional foci in alignment with the Danielson Framework and the Citywide Instructional Expectations that anchor instruction at the school. They are: (1) Students are to be engaged in tasks that are worth doing; (2) Students are to work in data-driven purposeful groups; and (3) Students are to experience frequent checks for understanding that teachers use to make adjustments to their lesson plans. These beliefs were illustrated across classrooms, including a social studies class, where students worked in groups at various stations to meet the learning objective of expressing reasons why the colonists became upset with Britain, via a tax activity, and writing their perspective on the Stamp Act. Students rotated through 3 stations with differentiated activities that helped them construct an understanding of the impact of the taxes on the colonist. The teacher provided an exit ticket to the students from an 11th grade Regents exam and used information from it to assign a homework assignment that was differentiated to meet the needs of that particular class.
- The principal shared that teachers utilize various multiple entry points into lessons by integrating technology, differentiation of tasks and materials, and enrichment opportunities via independent explorations within and outside of class time. However although instruction in several of the classrooms observed provided evidence of the principal's multiple entry points expectation, in a few other classrooms this was not the case. For example, in an English Language Arts class, students were paced differently as they worked independently on laptops to complete an essay on which they had received personalized feedback from their teacher via Google Docs, but all students were given the same task, the same graphic organizers, and the same rubric for evaluation of the task.
- Student ownership of learning was evident in some classrooms, such as one where students were observed producing work products via discussions where peers supported each other's work. For example, a student told his partner, "I want to make this 3 a 4 (referring to the rubric), what do you think?" His partner responded, "It says here to write supporting details. Maybe add that and it will raise your grade." This level of peer to peer discussion was not seen in other classrooms, such as a math class where students were engaged in a Common Core Standards aligned task. The entire class focused on the same questions, with students and the teacher having a back and forth discussion as a few students shared their responses about how to solve the ratio problem presented.

Additional Findings

Quality Indicator:	1.1 Curriculum	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders and faculty adopted selected curricula aligned to the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS). Teachers use student work and data to plan and further refine academic tasks across grades and content areas.

Impact

The school's adoption/refinement of curricula enables school wide coherence and college and career readiness for all students. Academic tasks provide opportunities for all students to be cognitively engaged.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal shared that the Common Core Standards are “the guide” to designing curricula and lesson plans at BEES. In addition, the school also uses the New York State Scope and Sequence for science and the New York State Scope and Sequence for social studies to develop curricula in these content areas. A review of curriculum maps indicated that teachers have a yearlong view that evolves month by month, to teach units of studies through the standards that support learning in each content area. Also evident in curriculum maps, units plans, and lesson plans are assessments, rubrics, learning objectives and portfolio assignments that are also aligned to the Common Core Standards.
- Initially, the school chose Code X for their English Language Arts curriculum but teachers were not pleased with it and articulated that the program lacked the rigor and scaffolds that the assessments revealed the students needed. Therefore, using student work and data, the teachers in collaboration with network support created a curriculum focused on learning skills through literature, close reading, and writing focused on argumentative and evidentiary claims for English Language Arts. Curriculum maps and lesson plans also indicate that unit tasks are differentiated for students with disabilities. The principal shared that teachers of students with disabilities work closely with content-area teachers to differentiate instruction, based on student work and data, so that all students are able to complete the rigorous tasks assigned. Monthly portfolio assignments showed evidence of modifications applied by the special educator assigned to that grade level. Instructional tasks are modified through the use of materials, leveled texts, and checklists so that all students can meet and have access to the requirements of the task.
- A review of the curriculum maps indicates that tasks include students being focused on reading/engaging with authentic literature and information texts, performing close readings and gathering evidence to support their positions. Through discussion and writing, students' tasks are designed to have all students answer deep questions that teachers present about text, cite evidence, determine author's purpose, and evaluate arguments. In addition, students are challenged to create writing pieces within the genre they are studying, and to publish a piece monthly after going through the writing process. In math, the curriculum focuses on problem-solving and real-world application of math concepts. The school chose Connected Math Program III (CMP3) which is a problem-based program that requires students to learn new concepts through the lens of real-world situations. Curriculum maps indicated that the instructional shifts, especially in the areas of building fluency, perseverance, constructing and critiquing arguments, and modeling, are evident.

Quality Indicator:	2.2 Assessment	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

Across classroom, teachers create assessments, rubric, and grading policies. Assessment practices consistently reflect the use of ongoing checks for understanding.

Impact

Assessment structures that exist across classrooms result in data driven feedback, student self-assessment, and teachers making needed adjustments to meet all students' learning needs.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal shared that the instructional focus for this school year is on assessment. He stated, "Teachers are expected to include checks for understanding throughout a lesson, use formative and summative assessments, conduct ongoing assessments including conferring and Running Records, as well as plan culminating assessments and projects such as portfolio pieces and unit tests." A review of students' progress reports, performance tasks, and work samples in folders indicate direct alignment to the principal's vision for teachers' use of assessments. Teachers provide numerous opportunities for students to be assessed via unit tests which determine student acquisition of content, quizzes, and benchmark assessments. In addition, during conferences about writing, teachers use Google docs to provide students with real time feedback and opportunities to self-monitor as they progress in their writing.
- Portfolio pieces are aligned to the curricula in each subject area and are determined by units of study as they assess the content that is covered by the applicable Common Core State Standards. For example there are portfolios based on realistic fiction, memoir, and the order of operations and the distributive property. Students' performance on portfolios are tracked in a spreadsheet using a grading tool that states that 90-100 is a rubric score of 2.66-4 and is color coded green, 75-89 is a rubric score of 2-2.33 and is color coded yellow, and 1-75 is a rubric score of 1-1.66 and is color coded red. Based on needs shown in students' work, teachers implement adjustments such as adding more opportunities for close reading of non-fiction text and fluency exercises in math to improve student learning.
- There is a school-wide grading policy that is standardized for all subject areas. Portfolios are classified as summative assessments and are worth 30% of the students' grade, homework is given nightly and is worth 20% of the students' grade, end of unit assessments which are unit tests, essays, and lab write ups are worth 30% of the students' grade, and class assignments which are daily assignments, labs, quizzes, and accountable talk are worth 20% of the students' grade.
- Teachers were observed using frequent checks for understanding during lessons. Techniques teachers used were thumbs up/thumbs down, questions such as, "Do you think the king's tax policy was fair?", and exit slips such as one focused on student learning about 'taxation without representation', which checked students' understanding of the content taught in relation to that topic. Students were also able to self-assess using rubrics, as observed in a sixth grade English Language Arts class, and feedback from teachers which incorporated rubric-aligned comments and peer collaborations to advance the student's work. During the peer collaborations, a pair of students was observed questioning each other and commenting on each other's work, with one telling the other, "I think you need to add more details to support this claim. One idea is not enough."

Quality Indicator:	3.4 High Expectations	Rating:	Proficient
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Findings

School leaders embed and communicate high expectations for staff and students, in alignment with the citywide expectations and Danielson Framework for Teaching and ensure structures are in place to support staff and students in meeting the expectations.

Impact

Staff and students are aware of the expectations of the school and the structures that support achieving these high expectations, leading to increased student achievement and readiness for the next grade.

Supporting Evidence

- The principal at BEES shared that his students must *STING*- (exercise) S-social responsibility, T- teamwork, I- interpersonal self-control, N- niceness, and G- grit. This acronym anchors a culture of high expectations that is nurtured via all stakeholders who ensure that the core values of “*Work hard, Learn well, Be Kind, Go Green*” are accomplished by students. The principal greets the students each morning with a *Morning Meeting* that is designed to reinforce expectations for productive learning each day. During this interaction the principal was observed reinforcing the high expectations embedded in the school’s mission statement which states that students will “foster high academic achievement, independent thinking, problem solving skills and civic engagement.”
- The principal uses *What’s the Buzz?* - a weekly newsletter that he writes to inform all staff about the upcoming week’s meetings, events, and responsibilities, with emphasis on instructional expectations aligned to the Danielson Framework for Teaching. Students receive monthly progress reports regarding their performance in all academic classes and teachers regularly receive professional development, including in the summer, to learn about and plan strategies for meeting the high expectations that the principal holds all staff accountable for. Agendas from these sessions show a focus on instructional and community building expectations as well as curriculum development and goal-setting priorities.
- BEES Advisory meetings occur three times a week between advisory teachers and students who discuss performance and the expectations in their classes. Advisors serve as academic mentors to students and help them to meet their academic potential. Advisors meet with students one-on-one to discuss progress reports, academic performance, and review students’ classwork. Advisors also use their time with students to read *BEES STING Book of the Month*. These books promote *STING* and students are responsible for presenting projects about the text to their peers at *Morning Meetings*. Seventh grade advisors discuss high school choices with their advisees. Students shared that their advisors “keep us on track and review our grades with us.”
- Teachers challenge students to meet high expectations by providing targeted and specific feedback to students about all portfolio pieces. Feedback includes both something positive that the student has done and something that the student needs to work on. An example of feedback is “Excellent voice...next time if you use you use all of your writing time we can get this edited.” This feedback was attached to a rubric where the teacher further indicated what the student achieved and stated expectations regarding what the student needs to work on. Similar expectations are also shared via feedback written on daily assignments in class or transmitted to students via Google Docs.